

BEST COPY

AVAILABLE

COPYRIGHT

DENIES U.S. BID TO OUST LAOS DEFENSE CHIEF

Disapprove of Phoumi State Dept. Says

By ROBERT YOUNG

(Chicago Times Staff Writer)

Washington, May 21 — The state department today denied a report that the United States has demanded removal of Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, the so-called strongman of Laos' royal government. But official sources disclosed this country has served official notice of disapproval of Phoumi's activities.

The state department also denied another report that the central intelligence agency is trying to get American policy in Laos and is working at cross-purposes with the department and other United States agencies in the Asian country.

President Kennedy met for an hour today with Secretary of State Dean Rusk and key advisers on far eastern problems. The White House described it as strictly a routine session.

The activities of Gen. Phoumi, the premier of the royal government of Laos, were discussed in Washington last night by W. Averell Harriman, assistant secretary of state for eastern affairs, and the Laotian ambassador, Tiao Tsunpan.

Disapproval of Phoumi's activities was made to official sources in the state department and the central intelligence agency. The United States strongly disapproved Phoumi's demand to stay in Laos and direct military operations in this month when the country's military broke a long-standing neutrality pact.

The demand was made after a new crisis in southeast Asia, giving the Reds control of northern Laos and forcing the sending of United States military forces to northern Thailand.

When royal Laos troops were retreating from the advancing Reds, Phoumi was reported to have urged the United States to grant \$1 million dollars a month which has been withheld since last February.

Harriman also was reported to have said the state department had demanded that Phoumi

join the leaders of the neutral and communist factions of Laos in demanding a coalition government and frustrated the objectives of the 1961 international conference on the country's independence.

Gen. Harriman's comments, officials said, indicated that if Phoumi gave more attention to his military duties and was less stubborn regarding negotiations for a coalition government, the royal government would be in a better position to negotiate with the other factions. One of the factors blocking productive negotiations has been the royal government's refusal to give up the defense and interior ministries.

Richard White, state department press officer, said today reports that Harriman demanded Phoumi's removal from the royal government were untrue. White said the state department has strongly urged, however, that the royal Lao government move ahead to negotiate promptly and realistically with the neutral and communist factions to form a government of national unity under a neutral leadership.

The United States has been withholding \$1 million dollars monthly grant in aid to the royal government since the demand for coalition talks.

The state department today reported that the Laotian government had agreed to negotiate with the neutral and communist factions to form a government of national unity under a neutral leadership.

FOIAb3b

COPYRIGHT